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ABSTRACT

To explore the possibility that the gender make-up of a class may predict the gender specificity of the language used by instructors, a study examined Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) and the number of gender examples they used. Subjects were eight graduate teaching assistants instructing a basic speech communication course and seven GTAs teaching a basic history course. In the basic communication courses there were approximately 260 students while there were 230 students enrolled in the history course. The number of gender-specific examples used by GTAs was recorded for each class and this number was compared with the gender make-up of each specific class. Three 2-way analysis of variance were conducted to examine the difference in examples used by male or female GTAs in classes which were predominately male or female. Results indicated that GTAs adapt their examples to the classroom gender majority. (Four tables of data are included.) Contains 18 references. (NH)

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Diversity in the Classroom: Gender Related Examples

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Diversity in the Classroom: Gender Related Examples

Abstract: Communication research suggests that males receive preferential treatment in the college classroom. However, few studies have explored the possibility that the gender make-up of the class may predict the gender specificity of the language used by instructors. For example, when the classroom majority is female, more female-specific language may be used by the instructor. This study examined Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and the number of gender examples they used. The total sample included 15 GTAs who taught 8 basic communication courses and 7 basic history courses respectively. The number of gender-specific examples used by GTAs was recorded for each class and then compared with the gender make-up of each specific class. Three two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the difference in examples used by male or female GTAs in classes which were predominately male or predominately female. Results indicated that GTAs adapt their examples to the classroom gender majority.

Gender Related Examples: An Observational Study

Research suggests that college instructors display bias against women and, in turn, create an environment which is sexist in nature (Cooper, 1987; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1985). Instances of gender insensitivity create this type of environment which has been termed a "chilly climate" by Hall and Sandler (1982). A chilly climate describes a context which is not conducive to women students' academic and personal development. Examples of this type of behavior include calling on male students more frequently than female students and allowing male students to contribute more comments to class discussion (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Usually, this gender insensitive behavior is unintentional and/or unconscious (Peterson, 1991). The purpose of this investigation was to examine teacher behavior, specifically example usage, to determine if instructors utilize gender specific examples which were predominately male oriented and may inadvertently contribute to or help create a chilly climate for female students.

Studies have shown that faculty members treat male and female students differently. For example, Cooper (1987) observed that teachers tend to use sexist language, call on male students more frequently than on female students, and ask male students questions that encourage critical thinking while female students are asked questions which require the regurgitation of facts. In addition, Hall and Sandler (1982) noted that professors–men and women alike–make more eye contact with male students, respond more to male students' comments, and interrupt female students more frequently than male students. According to Sandler (1991), by focusing a greater share of attention toward male students, "faculty unknowingly create a climate that subtly interferes with the development of women students' self-confidence, academic participation, and career goals" (p. 6). Consequently, a teacher's communicative behavior may encourage these outcomes. According to Pearson and West (1991), teachers provide more overt disparaging remarks to female students, discourage women from participating in classroom discussion, and prevent female students from seeking

levels, male students had more opportunities to interact than female students.

Consistently, researchers have shown that the style characteristic of most contemporary classrooms tends to favor men's way of thinking and learning and to disconfirm women's ways (Bunch & Pollack, 1983; Gabriel & Smithson, 1990; Sadker & Sadker, 1984). In other words, behavior such as asserting oneself is more rewarded than waiting ones turn, individual achievement is valued more highly than collaborative efforts, talking is encouraged more than listening, presenting new ideas is emphasized whereas responding to and synthesizing the ideas of classmates is not, competition is emphasized more than cooperation, and advancing firm conclusions is more highly regarded than holding tentative ones (Wood & Lenze, 1991). Obviously, the former behaviors in these examples are traditionally male qualities while the latter are typically female characteristics. Therefore, gender insensitivity or sexism may be a result of the traditional pedagogical process and may be inherent in academic institutions because the male style of learning is held in higher regard.

While the existence of gender insensitivity cannot be denied, it is not usually conscious or premeditated behavior. Hall and Sandler (1982) state that "changing everyday classroom behavior that expresses devalued and limited views of women is... difficult...because much differential treatment that may occur in classroom and related interaction is inadvertent and often below the level of consciousness of both faculty and students" (p. 13). However, this unintentionality should not be used as an excuse to allow sexist behavior to continue. A climate that equally values the interaction style of learning which is typical of women (Treichler & Kramarae, 1983) not only is kinder and more "hospitable" to women students, but also advances important social goals such as cooperation, effective listening, and being open minded (Whipple, 1987). Childers (1983) asserts that only when we maintain "consistent and informed attention to the existence, contributions and world-views of women" (p. 30) can we claim to have a gender balanced course.

The teaching process substantially affects the quality of learning. Therefore, it is vital

to develop strategies to enhance gender sensitivity in communication education and education in general if we are to provide a positive learning environment for all students–both male and female. However, before strategies can be developed to reduce gender bias, it is necessary to identify and examine those teaching behaviors employed by instructors which may contribute to a chilly climate. One area in which gender insensitivity may be evidenced is in the use of examples provided by teachers to aid student understanding and to help students conceptualize certain course concepts. The following research question guided this investigation:

RQ1: Do college instructors use more male examples than female examples?

Another variable of interest in this investigation was the gender of the instructor along with the gender make up of the class. According to previous research (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Pearson, 1985; Sadker & Sadker, 1985), gender impacts the classroom setting. Male teachers may be more responsible for differential treatment of students than female teachers (Pearson & West, 1991). According to Rosenfeld and Jarrard (1986) in their study of classroom interaction, sexism is primarily a "male disease" (p. 161). Therefore, does the gender of the instructor influence the difference of usage of male examples, female examples, or gender neutral examples? In addition to this, it may also be interesting to examine whether the gender make-up of a class impacts the type of gender examples used. For example, does an instructor use male examples if the class is made up primarily of men? Are neutral examples used when there are equal numbers of men and women? Or, are female examples given when the majority of students are women? These inquires lead to the following research questions:

RQ2: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of male examples used by the instructor ?

RQ3: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of female examples used by the instructor?

RQ4: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of gender neutral examples used by the instructor?

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 8 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) instructing the basic speech communication course and 7 GTAs teaching the basic history course; 8 GTAs were male and 7 were female respectively. In the basic communication courses taught by subjects, there were approximately 260 students while there were 230 students enrolled in the basic history course. The graduate teaching assistants were actively seeking Master's degrees in their respective fields.

Procedures

Data were collected by direct observation of classes taught by GTAs. A total of fifteen classes were observed; eight basic speech communication courses and seven basic history courses. Prior to data collection, permission to observe was granted by each GTA. Participation was strictly voluntary, there were no rewards for being involved in this study other than verbal expression of gratitude by the researchers. Researchers observed each one and one-half hour class concurrently and in all instances sat at opposite sides of the classroom in order to collect maximum data and to minimize bias. The duration of lecture in both the history and the speech communication courses was approximately equal. The GTAs observed were not informed of the research questions, only that the data would be used for the purpose of a research paper.

In each class, GTA gender was recorded along with gender make-up of the class. Gender make-up was recorded simply by counting the number of males and females in each class in order to determine if a class was predominately male or female. Of the 15 basic courses observed, 9 were composed primarily of men while the remaining 6 were composed primarily of females. Interestingly, none of the classes contained equal or near equal numbers of males and females.

In addition to recording GTA gender and student gender, researchers recorded the gender-specific examples used by each instructor. These were categorized and measured according to the following criteria. Examples that were to be labeled as male would be any or

all that referred to the male gender. For example, "As a scholar he would dictate to the rest of his field and what direction the procedure should take." Examples labeled as female were those with feminine connotations. An actual example was; "She self-disclosed personal information to show empathy." Neutral examples given by GTAs utilized non-sexist language. In other words, the GTAs did not indicate in these examples if the person was male or female. An example of this type used in one class was, "The person who was in charge of collecting historical literature for this class did not arrange it in chronological order." Thus, as long as the examples never used male/female pronouns, they were considered neutral. Both researchers recorded the number of male, female, and neutral examples per class.

Data Analysis

Manipulation of the data gathered was done in the form of three two-way ANOVAs, which tested for the difference between the type of examples used (male, female, neutral) and the gender of the instructor along with the gender composition of the class. In addition, because in this particular study there were two sets of data collected, a Pearsons' r correlation was conducted to test for intercoder reliability. The results showed a close correlation between the information gathered by both researchers. In fact, the correlation was .9 with a significance level of .01 for the male examples recorded, a correlation of .9 with a significance level of .01 for female examples recorded, and a .85 with a significance level of .01 for neutral examples.

RESULTS

A total of 180 examples were recorded in the fifteen 90-minute classes observed; 74 (41%) of which were male examples, 62 (34%) were female examples, and 44 (24%) were gender neutral examples respectively. These results are in answer to RQ1: Do college instructors use more male examples than female examples? In this sample, it appears as though more male examples were indeed given. Male GTAs used 41 (23%) male examples, 32 (18%) female examples, and 25 (14%) of the gender neutral examples. Female GTAs utilized 33 (18%) male examples, 30 (19%) female examples and 19 (11%) gender neutral

examples. These findings are summarized in Table I.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF MALE, FEMALE AND NEUTRAL EXAMPLES GIVEN BY GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

	Male Examples	Female Examples	Neutral Examples
Male GTA	41 (23%)	32 (18%)	25 (14%)
Female GTA	33 (18%)	30 (17%)	19 (11%)
TOTAL	74 (41%)	62 (34%)	44 (24%)

RQ2: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of male examples used by the instructor? Results of this research question were conducted by way of a two-way Analysis of Variance. By examining the two-way interactions, it was revealed that together, the two independent variables of instructor gender and gender composition of the classroom had no effect on the number of male gender comments. However, there was a significant effect of class gender majority. In classes where there was a majority of males, there was a greater likelihood of instructors to use male examples ($F=65.44$, $df=1/11$, $p<.0001$). There was no main effect where instructor gender was concerned; there was no interaction. These results are summarized in Table II.

TABLE II

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: MALE EXAMPLES BY INSTRUCTOR GENDER AND GENDER COMPOSITION OF CLASS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	55.645	2	27.822	33.387	.0001
Instructor Gender	.420	1	.420	.504	.493
Class Composition	54.537	1	54.537	65.445	.0001
2-Way Interactions					
Instructor Gender	.622	1	.622	.746	.406
Class Composition	.622	1	.622	.746	.406
Explained	56.267	3	18.756	22.507	.0001
Residual	9.167	11	.833		
Total	65.433	14	4.674		

RQ3: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of female examples used by the instructor? Again, results of this research question indicate that when taken together, instructor gender and classroom gender majority had no effect on the number of female gender comments made by either male or female instructors. However, classroom gender composition affects the number of female gender examples made by an instructor regardless of the instructor's gender ($F=39.821$, $df=1/11$, $p<.001$). These results are summarized in Table III. In this particular study, gender specific examples utilized by instructors appear to be indicative of the gender make-up of a class rather than the gender of the instructor.

TABLE III
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
FEMALE EXAMPLES BY INSTRUCTOR GENDER AND GENDER COMPOSITION OF CLASS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	40.007	2	20.004	14.847	.001
Instructor Gender	.007	1	.007	.006	.942
Class Composition	39.821	1	39.821	29.555	.0001
2-Way Interactions					
Instructor Gender	.005	1	.005	.004	.952
Class Composition	.005	1	.005	.004	.952
Explained	40.012	3	13.337	9.899	.002
Residual	14.821	11	1.347		
Total	54.833	14	3.917		

RQ4: Does the gender of the instructor or the gender composition of a class affect the number of gender neutral examples used by the instructor? For this particular research question, there were no significant results. This may be due to the fact that only 24%(44) of the total examples given were gender neutral examples. In addition, there were no classes observed by the researchers which contained equal or near equal numbers of males and females. Results of the two-way ANOVA conducted to test this research question are summarized in Table IV.

TABLE IV
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
NEUTRAL EXAMPLES BY INSTRUCTOR GENDER AND GENDER COMPOSITION OF CLASS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	3.012	2	1.506	.693	.521
Instructor Gender	.987	1	.987	.454	.514
Class Composition	2.176	1	2.176	1.001	.339
2-Way Interactions					
Instructor Gender	.305	1	.305	.140	.715
Class Composition	.305	1	.305	.140	.715
Explained	3.317	3	1.106	.508	.684
Residual	23.917	11	.833		
Total	27.233	14	1.945		

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the number of male, female, and gender neutral examples used by GTAs. Results indicated that there were more male examples used overall by the GTAs observed, however, not a significant amount. This study also examined two constructs–instructor gender and classroom gender composition–and how each affected the way in which an instructor tailored his/her examples for instructional purposes. In this particular study, the gender group in the majority of each class, significantly dictated the type of examples used by the instructor.

The results of this study should be regarded with caution for several reasons. First of all, this study was limited to 15 courses taught at one mid-sized university. Thus, the results may not be generalized to other institutions of higher learning. Second, only basic courses that were taught by Graduate Teaching Assistants were observed. The same results may not have been found had the researchers observed a range of lower to upper level classes. In addition, there is a possibility that GTAs are more apt to try to please their students so they used examples tailored to the majority in order to be liked. Therefore, if a cross-section of

university instructors were observed ranging from the novice instructor (GTA) to the more experienced tenured faculty member, the results may have supported the literature which suggests the existence of a masculinist culture in higher education (Bate, 1988). Thus, these implications should not be applied across the entire academic environment. Finally, a third limitation of this study involves the actual observation process. The researchers in this study observed the classes at the same time, making it possible for their nonverbal behavior of one researcher to influence one another. Although as much precaution as possible was taken to avoid such instances, it was still a possibility.

Although the results of this study did not significantly confirm the literature, communication educators need to be aware of how seriously gender insensitivity impedes learning. As communication scholars we have within our grasp the ability to make the necessary changes to avoid inconsistencies among those with whom we communicate. Eventually, through training and altering behavior, we could potentially eliminate many of the problems associated with sexist language (Wood & Lenze, 1991). This type of training will ultimately create a learning environment in the classroom and small group setting which could eliminate gender bias and the many problems associated with it. One way that we might try to succeed in such an endeavor is to organize workshops on university campuses (Wood & Lenze, 1991). The very fact that we are made aware of our downfalls will sometimes lead us to altering our ways. However, more research needs to be conducted in order to discover the specific ways in which instructors in higher education perpetuate sexism within the classroom. Only then can concrete strategies for change be implemented into the course curricula.

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